

BAYARD RUSTIN

"We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers..." Bayard Rustin

Bayard Rustin was a civil rights organizer and activist, best known for his work as adviser to Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1950s and '60s. He is widely known as the man who organized MLK Jr's March on Washington, which was one of the largest non-violent **protests** ever held in the United States [1]



Rustin was born in Pennsylvania in 1912, where he was raised as a Quaker. He excelled as a student, athlete, and singer. Rustin began his career as a political and social justice **activist** in 1937 when he moved to New York and became a community organizer, hired to work with youth on the problem of **segregation** as well as to advocate an anti-war position. [1]

As a committed **pacifist**, Rustin refused to register for the **draft**, and served three years in prison, beginning in 1943, as a way of protesting the war. In 1947, Bayard Rustin helped plan the first "freedom ride" in the South, where riders engaged in direct protest by intentionally violating the segregated seating demanded on Southern buses and trains. Along the way, they were beaten, arrested and fined. Eventually arrested in North Carolina, Rustin served 22 days on a chain gang. In the late 1940s, Mr. Rustin was **instrumental** in securing President Truman's order eliminating segregation in the armed forces. [1]



As a gay man, relatively open for his time, Bayard Rustin experienced anti-gay prejudice in addition to racial discrimination. Because of his **sexual orientation** as well as his **controversial** political positions, he was often seen as a political **liability** and given roles that occurred behind the scenes. Arrested in 1953 on a "morals charge," he lost his job, but found work with another anti-war group. During the 1980s, Rustin also opened up publicly about his **sexuality** which had largely been covered up by his political affiliates since the 1950s.



This **coincided** with his falling in love with Walter Naegle, Rustin's partner from the 1970's until his death in the late 80s. In a 1987 interview with the Village Voice, Rustin said, "I think the gay community has a moral obligation ... to do whatever is possible to encourage more and more gays to come **out of the closet**." For his part, he worked to bring the AIDS crisis to the attention of the NAACP, once predicting, "Twenty-five, 30 years ago, the barometer of human rights in the United States were black people. That is no longer true. The **barometer** for judging the character of people in regard to human rights is now those who consider themselves gay, homosexual, lesbian." [2]

Late in life, Bayard Rustin gave numerous interviews discussing how anti-gay prejudice had affected his life's work. He was invited to address gay and lesbian groups and testified on behalf of New York City's gay rights bill. [1]

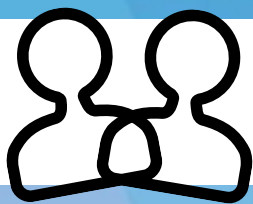
Rustin died on August 24, 1987, of a perforated appendix. An obituary in The New York Times reported, "Looking back at his career, Mr. Rustin, a Quaker, once wrote: 'The principal factors which influenced my life are 1) nonviolent tactics; 2) constitutional means; 3) democratic procedures; 4) respect for human personality; 5) a belief that all people are one.'" Rustin was survived by Walter Naegle, his partner of ten years.. [3]

Terminology



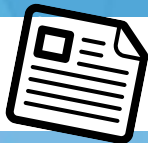
1. **Protests:** a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something
2. **Activist:** a person who works or campaigns to bring about political or social change.
3. **Segregation:** the enforced separation of different racial groups in a country, community, or establishment
4. **Pacifist:** a person who believes that war and violence are unjustifiable.
5. **Draft:** a system for selecting young men for required military service
6. **Instrumental:** necessary or influential in making something happen
7. **Sexual Orientation/Sexuality:** who a person is drawn to or attracted to emotionally and romantically
8. **Controversial:** likely to create disagreement
9. **Liability:** a person or thing whose presence or behavior is likely to cause embarrassment or put one at a disadvantage
10. **Coincided:** happened at the same time as
11. **"Out of the closet":** to publicly announce a truth that one has kept hidden, especially one's sexuality.
12. **Barometer:** something that reflects changes in circumstances or opinions.

Discussion



1. How does one's identity shape his or her actions?
 - a. Give an example of how your identity has shaped your actions.
2. What does it mean to be an insider? What does it mean to be an outsider?
 - a. In what ways or areas was Rustin an "insider" and in what ways was he an "outsider?"
 - b. In what have **you** been an "insider?" An "outsider?"
3. Why are people pressured to highlight certain aspects of their identity and to hide or downplay other parts?
 - a. What effect does this have on those individuals?
 - b. What effect does this have on society as a whole?
4. Historians have called Rustin the "invisible man" and the "unknown hero" of the civil rights movement. **Why do you think Rustin has been hidden from history?**
 - a. Do you see him as a hero? Why or why not?
4. In addition to the civil rights movement, what other historical moments, movements, or stories have been told without LGBT voices?
 - a. How does this affect how we think about these stories?
5. How do communities amplify their voices?
 - a. What examples have you seen in the news or on television recently of groups attempting to be heard?

Document A



BAYARD RUSTIN / A TIMELINE

1912 Born in West Chester, PA

1932 Begins studying at Wilberforce College in Ohio; Later transfers to Cheyney State Teachers College



1936 Declares himself a Quaker

1937 Trains with the American Friends Service Committee Moves to New York City; attends City College of New York Becomes an organizer for the Youth Communist League; repudiates the organization in 1941

1940 Appears on Broadway alongside Paul Robeson in *John Henry*

1941 Serves as Race Relations Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation With Asa Philip Randolph and Rev. A.J. Muste, proposes a 1941 March on Washington to protest discrimination in the military; the March is called off when President Roosevelt signs an executive order establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee

1942 Serves as Field Secretary for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) Arrested and beaten for refusing to give up his seat on a bus



1943 Begins relationship with Davis Platt, Jr.

1945 Sentenced to three years in a Kentucky prison for failure to appear before the draft board; serves 26 months, during which time he integrates the prison

1947 Helps plan the Journey of Reconciliation "freedom ride," a precursor to the 1960s freedom rides; serves 22 days on a chain gang after his arrest for defying segregation laws Relationship with Platt ends

1953 Arrested in Pasadena, CA



1956 A. Philip Randolph sends Rustin to assist the Montgomery Bus Boycott; Rustin persuades Dr. King to embrace Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent protest

1956-57 Helps Dr. King form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference



1957 Organizes the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom

1960 King severs ties with Rustin

1963 Serves as Deputy Director & chief organizer of March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom



1964 Co-founds the A. Philip Randolph Institute

1977 Begins relationship with Walter Naegle, with whom he will spend the rest of his life

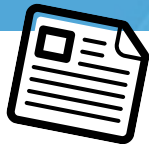


1987 Dies in New York City

2013 Posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama

Review the timeline above and note any relevant information you can use for your response to the prompt in the Performance Task.

Document B



Read and annotate this excerpt from Audre Lorde's essay.

As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmented way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living.

Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." **Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches**. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984. 120-121.

Document C



Read and annotate these 2 excerpts, both primary sources, written by Bayard Rustin between 1942 and 1965.



BAYARD RUSTIN IN HIS OWN WORDS

EXCERPTS FROM "PROTEST TO POLITICS: THE
FUTURE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT"
(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN COMMENTARY, FEBRUARY 1965)

THE DECADE SPANNED BY the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school desegregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 will undoubtedly be recorded as the period in which the legal foundations of racism in America were destroyed. [...]

On the other hand, without making light of the human sacrifices involved in the direct-action tactics (sit-ins, freedom rides, and the rest) that were so instrumental to this achievement, we must recognize that in desegregating public accommodations, we affected institutions which are relatively peripheral to the fundamental conditions of life of the Negro people. In a highly industrialized, 20th century civilization, we hit Jim Crow precisely where it was most anachronistic, dispensable, and vulnerable — in hotels, lunch counters, terminals, libraries, swimming pools, and the like. [...]

What is the value of winning access to public accommodations for those who lack money to use them? The minute the movement faced this question, it was compelled to expand its vision beyond race relations to economic relations, including the role of education in modern society. And what also became clear is that all these interrelated problems, by their very nature, are not soluble by private, voluntary efforts, but require government action — or politics.

EXCERPT FROM "NONVIOLENCE VS. JIM CROW"
(ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN FELLOWSHIP, JULY 1942)

RECENTLY I WAS PLANNING to go from Louisville to Nashville by bus. I bought my ticket, boarded the bus, and, instead of going to the back, sat down in the second seat. The driver saw me, got up, and came toward me.

"Hey, you. You're supposed to sit in the back seat."

"Why?"

"Because that's the law. Niggers ride in back."

I said, "My friend, I believe that is an unjust law. If I were to sit in back I would be condoning injustice."

Angry, but not knowing what to do, he got out and went into the station. He soon came out again, got into his seat, and started off.

This routine was gone through at each stop, but each time nothing came of it. Finally the driver, in desperation, must have phoned ahead, for about thirteen miles north of Nashville I heard sirens approaching. The bus came to an abrupt stop, and a police car and two motorcycles drew up beside us with a flourish. Four policemen got into the bus, consulted shortly with the driver, and came to my seat.

"Get up, you —— nigger!"

"Why?" I asked.

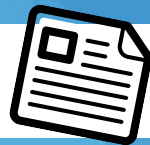
"Get up, you black ——!"

"I believe that I have a right to sit here," I said quietly. "If I sit in the back of the bus I am depriving that child — I pointed to a little white child of five or six — of the knowledge that there is injustice here, which I believe it is his right to know. It is my sincere conviction that the power of love in the world is the greatest power existing. If you have a greater power, my friend, you may move me."

How much they understood of what I was trying to tell them I do not know. By this time they were impatient and angry. As I would not move, they began to beat me about the head and shoulders, and I shortly found myself knocked to the floor. Then they dragged me out of the bus and continued to kick and beat me.

Knowing that if I tried to get up or protect myself in the first heat of their anger they would construe it as an attempt to resist and beat me down again, I forced myself to be still and wait for their kicks, one after another. Then I stood up, spreading out my arms parallel to the ground, and said, "There is no need to beat me. I am not resisting you."

Document D



Watch the video and take notes on events and ideas related to Bayard Rustin's message and how his identity shaped that message.



<https://goo.gl/5AizZS>



Source: Youtube.com *The Civil Rights Movement's Gay Hero You've Never Heard Of*. Retrieved November 1, 2017.